

# Kennedy proposes intervention team for mentally ill

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EAST PROVIDENCE — A statewide crisis intervention team may be the best way to handle mentally ill residents and their families when the police are called, U.S. Rep. Patrick Kennedy said yesterday.

He visited the city's Senior Center to discuss ways to cope with rising gas and oil prices. Afterward with the media, Kennedy offered his opinion on Friday's death in police custody of Mark Jackson, 47, a Warwick man who had previously been diagnosed with schizophrenia.

Related links Questions linger about man's death in custody West Warwick police officers were responding that night to a call from a motorist who reported seeing people damaging a sign at Joyal's Liquor Store on West Warwick Avenue. Jackson was walking behind the store and the police say he didn't comply with police requests and then became "combative." The officers struck Jackson with batons on his legs, said the police, but witnesses say Jackson received "elbow jabs to the ribs" and a knee to the face.

Jackson is the third reported Rhode Islander who had a mental illness and died while in police custody this year. The others are Leonel Farias, of East Providence, and Jason M. Swift, of Pawtucket.

Farias, a 40-year-old man with schizophrenia, died while in East Providence police custody in late February after what Chief Hubert J. Paquette labeled a "violent struggle" with police officers. They had been called to the family's house, at 153 James St., by Farias' father after his son had an outburst.

Farias was outside the house waving a knife when the police arrived. The police said officers used a chemical spray and struck Farias to try to take him into custody, but Farias continued to struggle even after being handcuffed and pinned to the pavement. Farias lost consciousness and was taken to Rhode Island Hospital, where he was pronounced dead.

Farias' family has alleged that the police used excessive force and caused Farias' death by beating and kicking him. An autopsy from the medical examiner's office has not been finished, spokeswoman Andrea Bagnall Degos yesterday.

"The medical examiner is finalizing a few things and it should be released in a few days," Bagnall Degos said. As for the delay, she continued, "As you know, it's a complicated case."

On Feb. 12, a Pawtucket police officer shot and killed Swift in the apartment he shared with his mother. She called the police asking for help getting him to Butler Hospital, a private psychiatry facility in Providence. She said her son had suffered a nonviolent “nervous breakdown” a few months earlier.

On the morning of the shooting, Swift had started talking to himself, prompting his mother’s 911 call. When the police arrived, Swift, who, like Farias, was a large man at 6 feet 4 inches and 300 pounds, was waving a Samurai-style sword in the yard outside of the apartment house where he lived.

“We’ve seen this tragedy occur several times this year,” Kennedy said. “... This is where officers need to work collaboratively with mental-health experts.”

Kennedy said he helped secure \$200,000 last month to increase sensitivity training — with emphasis on handling the mentally ill — for new police recruits in the state’s training academy. He said the money and training is a “start,” but after Friday’s incident, he believes creating a crisis team may be best for future, similar incidents.

The congressman didn’t elaborate on who would be on the team, but said the first responding officers should still be better trained. He said they need to know how to determine if a person is mentally ill in order to contact the state team. The officers may also have to learn a different approach until the team arrives, such as using “lower voices” or have one or two responders in plain clothes rather than in uniform.

While he mentioned them, Kennedy didn’t comment specifically on any of the three incidents. He also said it’s hard to know what happened if one’s not there, but emphasized something needs to be done.

Said Kennedy, “This is not a problem that is going to go away.” Death probed in Boston

The parents of a man who stopped breathing after his arrest during the Boston Celtics NBA championship celebration are raising questions about his death, and what happened while he was in police custody.

David Woodman died Sunday, 11 days after his arrest for allegedly drinking in public and resisting arrest.

The police say they began CPR immediately after noticing the 22-year-old was in medical distress.

But a lawyer for his parents said yesterday he suffered significant brain damage after he stopped breathing for at least several minutes while in police custody.

The police and the Suffolk County district attorney are investigating Woodman’s death.  
(AP)

